Emotional Intelligence
Boosts Customer Satisfaction

There's an old saying in sales that *people buy people*, and it essentially means that no matter how much value you offer to your customers, what tends to make the sale is whether or not they like the person doing the selling.

The same holds true for customer satisfaction. Marketing and advertisements may get customers in the door, but repeat business is almost wholly dependent on how your customers feel about the service.

So if "being liked" is the key to customer satisfaction, then how do you achieve that goal? Researchers believe that the answer may lie in something called "emotional intelligence."

What Is Emotional Intelligence?

Popularized by author Daniel Goleman, emotional intelligence is a modern extension of the concept of social intelligence, a field of study developed in the 1920s through observation of social interactions between animals. Although definitions shift as research advances, emotional intelligence basically describes the ability to recognize, describe, understand, manage, influence, and utilize emotion.

Confusing? If the term "people person" comes to mind, then you're on the right track. Here are four factors that make up emotional intelligence:

Perceiving Emotions — the ability to detect emotions of others by reading their facial expressions, tone of voice, mannerisms, and body language:

If you've ever watched a poker player detect an opponent's bluff simply by looking at the person, then you're seeing this trait in action.

Using Emotions — the ability to match tasks to one's shifting emotions and capitalize on the advantages offered by each.

People who are artistic tend to have this ability and are capable of utilizing strong emotion to inspire their creativity.

Understanding Emotions — the ability to comprehend emotional language and to develop insight into how emotions are formed and how they motivate.

Good salespeople and politicians almost always carry this trait. Pay attention to the kind of advertising or political speech that spurs you to positive action. Chances are that it's not logic, but an appeal to emotion that's motivating you.

Managing Emotions — the ability to regulate and control emotions in ourselves and others.
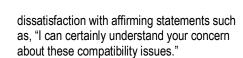
Leaders of all types share this ability. People who are good at managing emotions tend to be self-starters who are able to rally others to their causes.

Using Your Emotional Intelligence with Customers

While it's true that some people have a higher innate potential than others, anyone can improve his or her emotional intelligence to a point.

In order to maximize customer satisfaction, you need to tune in to your customers' shifting emotional needs and respond to them effectively. Here are some tips to get you started:

1. Focus on your customers' emotions, not your own. The more you practice observing and analyzing customers' changing emotions, the better you'll become at it. Soon you'll be able to actually anticipate and shift undesirable emotions into positive territory.

2. Validate your customers' feelings by using empathetic language. Respond to dissatisfaction with affirming statements such as, "I can certainly understand your concern about these compatibility issues."

3. Use emotional language when addressing performance goals. Ask questions such as, "How can I make sure that you're happy with this project?"

4. Anticipate your customers' concerns and address them proactively. This reassures your customers that you understand them and are looking out for their best interests.

5. Be aware of the signals you send through your body language. Some habits, like frowning while concentrating, can unintentionally communicate rudeness.

6. Tailor your service to individual customer needs. Some customers like to be involved with everything you're doing. Others may want you to just get it done and report back when finished. The more you understand your customers' idiosyncrasies, the more they'll feel like you understand them.

These techniques can also be useful in dealing with coworkers. In fact, you can improve all your relationships — both professional and personal — by developing your emotional intelligence, so why not get started today?